

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-2309

August 23, 2010

The Honorable Eric H. Holder, Jr.
Attorney General
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20530-0001

Dear Attorney General Holder,

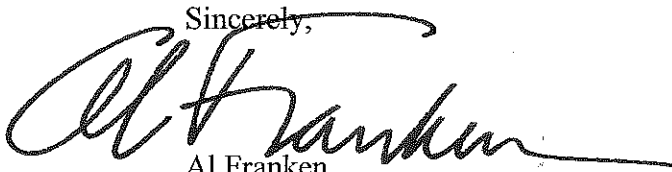
I write today to express my concern about the dangers posed by hidden geotagging data in online media, and in particular, the possibility that this new technology could have devastating consequences for stalking victims.

Technological advances in online media have led to the rapid proliferation of “geotags”—information about a person’s location that is embedded in photos and videos taken with smartphones or other devices equipped with GPS or other location-sensing technology. While embedded geotags may be desirable features for many consumers, I am troubled by how easily this information can be made public without the user’s knowledge. With the rise of devices and applications with geotagging automatically turned on, a stalking victim who posts a photo or message to friends online may unwittingly broadcast his or her exact location to a stalker or anyone else who cares enough to look.

Last year, the Department of Justice released a stalking victimization study that used data collected during a 2006 supplement to the annual National Crime Victimization Survey. However, that data predates the widespread use of mobile devices that automatically add geotags. I therefore urge the Department to collect the data necessary to update that study. If that is not possible, I ask that you collect data through another means that can inform Congress on the use of location-based technologies by stalkers to inform public policy in this arena. After this data is collected, I urge the Department to take any and all appropriate actions in response to the findings.

I appreciate your consideration of this matter. If you have any questions or concerns, please don’t hesitate to contact me, or Stephanie Potter of my staff, at (202) 224-5641. Thank you, and I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Al Franken", with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

Al Franken
United States Senator